United Nations

Press Release

Department of Public Information • News Coverage Service • New York

Prepared by Central News

DH/886
9 May 1991

THURSDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Secretary-General, in Washington, D.C., says visit confirms the support and commitment of United States to United Nations.

- Executive Chairman of Special Commission to monitor disarmament of Iraq says elimination of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction is essential ingredient in achieving lasting peace in Middle East region.

- Allied forces in Persian Gulf are withdrawn from demilitarized zone between Iraq and Kuwait.

- United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator appeals for immediate assistance to Bangladesh, devastated by cyclone.

- Special Committee on Peace-Keeping emphasizes importance of financial support as demand for such operations increases.

- Colombia and United Nations Drug Control Programme sign $4 million agreement for drug abuse prevention project.

* * *

Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar said today in a statement following a meeting with President George Bush in Washington, D.C., that his visit to the capital had been an important opportunity to discuss the urgent issues which concern both the United States and the United Nations. The discussions had, he said, as always, been "cordial, candid, far-reaching and productive". Moreover, for the United Nations the occasion had again confirmed the support and commitment of the United States and its people to the Organization.

The Secretary-General went on to say that the world's nations were calling insistently on the United Nations to be their forum and their agent for confronting problems. The response of the world community to these challenges would have to match the needs, he said.

(more)

For information media—not an official record

There existed a broader agreement than ever before on the nature and importance of the responsibilities that must be met, the Secretary-General said. At the same time, however, effective action was required to measure up to the speed and size of current events.

* * *

The plan for the disposal of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, contained in the Security Council's cease-fire resolution of 3 April, was described today as "a sound plan" which was being implemented as envisaged by the Council. The description was made to the press by Rolf Ekeus, Executive Chairman of the Special Commission established to oversee the destruction, removal or rendering harmless of Iraq's biological, chemical and ballistic missile capabilities. The Commission is to assist the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in disposing of Iraq's nuclear-weapons capabilities. It is also to submit a plan for the verification of Iraq's undertaking not to acquire such weapons in future.

Briefing correspondents at Headquarters, Mr. Ekeus said the elimination of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction was an essential ingredient in achieving a lasting peace in the region. Describing Iraq's attitude so far as "cooperative", he said the Commission's task was to verify the correctness of the Iraqi declaration and to determine undeclared sites as well.

Mr. Ekeus went on to say that the destruction phase would not be easy. According to Iraq, some of the munitions in question were under the rubble of bombed buildings and some contained nerve gas.

Asked by correspondents if the weapons would be destroyed at what was described as "the one place in the world -- the United States facility in Johnston Island -- where chemical weapons can be destroyed safely", Mr. Ekeus said there were other facilities. He stressed the importance of economy, efficiency, speed and safety, which pointed towards the need for some other solution. However, while no options had as yet been excluded prior to on-site inspections, it was the Commission's view at present that "we have to destroy it on the spot", he said.

Asked if Iraq would have to pay for the destruction of its own weapons, Mr. Ekeus said it was his understanding that the costs would be assessed by the General Assembly and, hopefully, that they would be supplemented by voluntary contributions in cash and kind.

* * *

A United Nations official said last night that the allied forces in the Persian Gulf were expected to be fully withdrawn today, 9 May, from the demilitarized zone between Iraq and Kuwait. The United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission (UNIKOM) had completed its deployment in the zone between the two countries and was ready to take over.

(more)

The official said UNIKOM's Major-General Gunther Greindl had been in Baghdad where he had met with Iraqi officials to inform them of the completion of the full deployment of the peace-keepers. He had asked them to withdraw from the demilitarized zone in compliance with Security Council resolution 687 (1991) of 3 April, which set the conditions for a cease-fire in the Gulf war. A similar request had been made to the Kuwaiti side.

While in Baghdad, the General had also met Under-Secretary-General Marrack Goulding, whom the Secretary-General has sent on a mission to Iraq to gather information on the refugee situation and the United Nations take-over of allied refugee camps, the official said.

In a separate development, the Secretary-General's Spokesman told correspondents today that Mr. Pérez de Cuéllar had said just before the meeting with President Bush in Washington, D.C., that Mr. Goulding had reported from Baghdad that the Iraqi Government had rejected the idea of a United Nations police force in Iraq.

* * *

Briefing correspondents at Headquarters today about the effects of last week's cyclone in Bangladesh, the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator, M'Hamad Essaafi, said the confirmed death toll of 125,000 was rising as more information was received from remote areas. He said the Government estimated that somewhere between 7 million to 10 million people had been affected by the disaster and that more than 2 million were in immediate need of water and food.

Mr. Essaafi said an appeal was being launched today by the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO) for immediate assistance, and another appeal would be launched within the next few months to finance the reconstruction of Bangladesh. So far, about $200 million had been pledged by the international community, while $1.4 billion was needed.

* * *

The Special Committee on Peace-keeping Operations continued its debate yesterday on the financing of such operations.

Speakers emphasized that the recent establishment of UNIKOM and the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) signalled the international community's confidence in United Nations peace-keeping operations, but said that confidence must be backed by financial commitment.

Also discussed were the merits of developing a legal definition of peace-keeping operations. Some speakers said a rigid definition was inappropriate to an evolving institution which responded to unpredictable events; others said guidelines for the conduct of peace-keeping operations would enhance their effectiveness.

(more)

Among the speakers, Jean Feyder of Luxembourg, speaking on behalf of the 12 member countries of the European Economic Community (EEC), called for the prompt payment of all obligations to peace-keeping operations, which, he said, was in deficit of $358 million. He said the Twelve, contributing some 30 per cent of that total, were discharging their obligations.

Speaking for Nigeria, Ibrahim A. Gambari said his country had actively participated in five operations and had given financial, logistic and political support for all United Nations peace-keeping operations. He proposed that the Committee consider extending peace-making forces to, for example, Liberia and Angola, where civil strife could expand into inter-State conflicts.

Kirsten Norregaard Rasmussen of Denmark, speaking on behalf of Finland, Norway and Sweden, said four new operations for the near future were being discussed, all of which would pose additional requirements for the Secretariat. The Nordic countries had a training system that had been functioning for a number of years, and they were ready to share their experience, she said.

* * *

The Minister of Justice of Colombia, Jaime Giraldo Angel, and the Executive Director of the United Nations International Drug Control Programme, Giorgio Giacomelli, today signed an agreement for a $4 million drug abuse prevention project to help Colombian youth.

The three-year project is designed to develop lasting strategies and facilities to prevent young people at risk from becoming involved in drugs. It will address, in particular, the problem of youth unemployment and offer opportunities for personal development, training and counselling to those who might otherwise fall into a life of violence, crime, drug trafficking and drug abuse.

The United Nations Drug Control Programme is making the $4 million available under a new $38 million package of assistance to Colombia, which includes activities in the fields of drug abuse prevention and treatment, rural development and coca crop substitution, law enforcement and assistance to the judiciary.

* *** *